

FWP Commission Agenda Item Cover Sheet

Meeting Date: August 30, 2012

Agenda Item: 2012 Late Season Migratory Bird Regulations

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Rule

Time for this Presentation: 15 minutes

Background: Late season migratory bird hunting regulations pertain to ducks, geese, swans, and coots. Montana participates in both the Central and Pacific Flyways and adheres to the federal frameworks established by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in cooperation with the flyway councils. Frameworks are based on population status from winter surveys for geese and May population and habitat surveys for ducks. Duck seasons are developed with an adaptive harvest approach with three specific regulation packages (restrictive, moderate, liberal) based on pond counts and mallard breeding populations. Recent habitat conditions and population numbers are favorable allowing liberal season frameworks. May duck surveys revealed record numbers of ducks, 43 percent above the long-term average, although pond counts were down from 2011.

In response to Commission direction at the August 2 meeting, two options were proposed for consideration in the Central Flyway, and are generally described below. Proposed season elements and pros/cons are detailed in the attachments. There is no proposed split in the Pacific Flyway.

- 1) No change from the 2011 Central Flyway framework – no breaks within the season dates.
- 2) Mid-season split – Close the Central Flyway duck and goose seasons during Oct 15-30, and then re-open the season(s) extending the ending dates later into January.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The public comment period on the proposals extends through 5 p.m., Monday, August 27. Comments received by August 16 were forwarded to the Commission. The attached public comment summary identifies multiple issues and concerns with the options presented.

Alternatives and Analysis: The above options are available for consideration. In addition, other options could be considered including moving the closure period later into the season or offering the standard duck season framework in duck Zone 1. Those options are discussed in the attached materials.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The status quo season is considered by FWP to represent the most consistent opportunity for late season waterfowl hunting across years and FWP anticipates potentially substantial public dissatisfaction with any closed period during the fall. FWP recommends adopting Option 1, without a closed period.

Proposed Motion: I move to adopt the final 2012 late waterfowl seasons, specifically Option 1, without a mid-season closure, as proposed by FWP.
